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ABSTRACT

Current curriculum research does not adequately define and test important variables. Therefore, it is difficult to make effective generalizations about long range issues related to curriculum analysis and implementation. An evaluation of a social studies curriculum implementation program in St. Louis provides a number of model variables that must be taken into consideration in systematic research projects. Eight of these variables are critically related to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the curriculum implementation and dissemination in that project and include inter-district differences, teacher differences, administrative liason, goal ambiguity, teacher role conflict, inadequate conceptual skills, administrative complexity, and defects in conceptual design. Further, there is little research focused on the process of curriculum evaluation, the personnel who ought to be involved in the process and their particular impact, or the means by which results of research are infused into the decision-making setting. New research must consider these problems in addition to publishers' goals and research, community involvement, teacher education, funding, and commitment to long tern research programs. (Author/DE)

A CONTEXT FOR CONSIDERING CURRICULUM RESEARCH

by

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American Educational Research Association

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As you will note from the program, we have been charged with the task of presenting to you a case study of curriculum research related to a particular social studies curriculum. In preparing for this presentation, several things have become quite evident. First of all, in the literature, there is little distinction made between curriculum evaluation, curriculum implementation research and curriculum research per se. While surely one would hope that curriculum evaluation is based on research, or at least has a research orientation, I find that in reviewing the literature related to curriculum evaluation and curriculum research, including an ERIC Search, there needs to be a distinction made. Much of what goes by the name of curriculum evaluation is certainly not research. A second consideration that needs to be made explicit at the outset is that as one reviews curriculum evaluation and/or research, one is taken by the complexity of the phenomenon. The issues are many and cloudy, the language confusing, the variables multitudinous, the results overgeneralized and the needs gargantuan. It is the thrust of the presentation by Frances Link to attempt to examine some of the critical issues inherent in curriculum research evidenced through her experiences with the research related to a particular curriculum model.

What one would have to say about research in the social studies could very well be said about all other curriculum areas with equal accuracy. I would be remiss if I did not suggest at the outset that the following comments on the nature of curriculum research are not meant to be critical, but rather to simply report a set of conditions.

Reviewing, for example, the ASCD publication entitled, "Elementary School Social Studies: A Guide to Current Research" by Maxine Dunfee, published in 1970, along with several other reviews of research, it will be noted that most of what comes under the rubric of research in the social studies, and undoubtedly for other curricular areas as well, tends to relate to identifying and assessing the levels of cognitive development on the part of students over a limited period of time, varying skill or attitudinal changes on the part of learners, teacher attitudes and preferences for a particular piece of curriculum or particular approach to teaching, descriptive analyses of curriculum designs and curriculum content, the nature of the learner in relationship to his progress in a particular program, or the implications of a particular instructional methodology for particular student outcome. With respect to theoretical dimensions of research issues, there is considerable curriculum research relating to the methodology of research, theoretical structures and analytical designs of curricula, or identification of methods

and materials appropriate for particular content areas or instructional intents implicit in the programs, etc. All of these particular thrusts in curriculum research are important and worthwhile contributions to be sure, but in most cases, they tend to be piecemeal. They do not come together in any significant way, so as to permit us to make effective long-range generalizations about what may be some of the more critical issues related to curriculum analysis and the impact of curriculum implementation. In fact, it would be our thesis that the more critical issues demand curriculum research which is longitudinal in nature, designed to examine the long-term effects on both students and teachers, especially those who are involved in the development, adaptation and implementation of significant curricular efforts, whether school designed or designed by outside teams. Again, to be sure, one should not underestimate the impact and the usefulness of much of the work that has gone forward in both curriculum evaluation and research, for without it we would not be nearly as far along as we are at this point in time. However, given the fact that any curriculum implementation in a school setting is intended to have a long-term effect within the context of a total educational sequence, it would certainly seem implicit to us that that very factor points up the need to mount and maintain substantial efforts toward longitudinal research projects.

In a recent article by Gene Vert and Donald MacFayden, published in Social Education, May, 1974, I quote:

> "The day of purchasing a new instructional program and issuing an edict requiring its immediate use in the classroom is beginning to wane. Increasingly, school administrators are finding that they can ill affort the luxury of such automatic high-handed procedures. Unless teachers are directly involved in the selection and evaluation of new programs, and taught to use them in the classroom, the installation of such programs is at best a risky venture."

In another recent publication, John Herlihy notes with respect to implementing a new curriculum design, that if a long-term or widespread change is in fact to occur, a broad base of support is critical, and that "an implementation system that is able to generate broad acceptance breaks down the usual resistance against the new, presented by the middle and late adopters." He also notes that if, a curriculum design is, in fact, a powerful curriculum design, it promotes more than just a curriculum change. It is also a powerful teacher education package. It is important to distinguish between an integrated curriculum system whose components are researchable from a collection of instructional materials independent of a curriculum design. These materials may be useful in contributing to the achievement of specific local objectives, but they do not contribute to an overall view of curriculum research in the context which is our point of reference.

This brings us, then to the point where it may be useful to identify some of the variables that have not been adequately tested within curriculum research. We believe several of these variables are very much in need of testing, and some of them have at least begun to be tested in work with Man: A Course of Study. Man: A Course of Study is characteristic of a curriculum system and not a collection of pieces.

Initially, I would like to suggest that the work done by Ronald Havelock and associates in the Center for Research on Utilization of Scientific Knowledge at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan should not go unnoted. The work of this group of scholars implicitly and explicitly calls for, and suggests useful paradigms for examining the nature of involvement of staff and resource personnel in the curriculum change process. To date a modicum of research has related to teachers and the teacher role in the curriculum development and implementation process. We would submit that teacher involvement in curriculum development and implementation is an absolutely critical factor and has been relatively unattended to in curriculum research efforts. For example, in carrying out a recent examination of the literature I found only a small number, perhaps three or four, legitimate studies which focused on the relationship of the teacher to the curriculum change process. There may be more, but that happened to be all that I located in my search.

The type of studies to which I make reference are other than examinations or analyses of teachers' skills and competencies. Rather they view "teacher" as a central figure in the curriculum development and implementation process. One of these studies, a Canadian project, dealt with the classroom teacher as curriculum developer for example. A more extensive study worthy of citation provides some clues for identifying' variables to be researched in future curriculum development activities with focus on teacher role.

This particular project was an evaluation of a social studies curriculum implementation program in the St. Louis area published in 1970. (Center for Educational Field Services - Washington University). The project was designed to train teachers in effective techniques of curriculum implementation in social studies and the dissemination of new social studies curricula in the St. Louis metropolitan area. While there were no surprises in the findings, the results did provide a listing of some interesting areas for consideration. In fact, I would suggest that they are variables that ought to be taken into consideration in systematic research projects related to curriculum dissemination and diffusion. These particular variables happen to be the factors which appeared to be critically related to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of curriculum implementation and dissemination in that project.

1. Inter-district differences - there was substantial evidence of inter-district difference effect from both size and character of the district. The study pointed to differences in administrative attitudes and level of support which shaped the caliber of teachers selected for such a project.

2. Teacher differences - Coming out of this particular study was the suggestion that teachers needed to know their subject matter as well as be committed to the project, a factor which tended to be related, in part at least, to the nature of the organization of the home school district, along with a degree of administrative support for the project.

3. Administrative liaison, was found to be especially critical at the diffusion stage.

4. Goal ambiguity. It was the project director's view that the experimental program was devised for teaching teachers the skills and insights necessary to prepare them to assume positions of leadership in introducing new curricula in the schools. On the contrary, it appeared that teachers assumed that it was a curriculum development materials workshop where they were to gain access to particular new curricula. At least this was suggested by their behaviors.

5. Role strain. The researchers pointed out that there were no precedents for the roles that the teachers had to play as they

proceeded in the experimental project. There was evidence of high anxiety, growing especially out of the necessity for teachers to cope with multiple role differences and expectations in their "back home" school situations.

6. Inadequate conceptual tools, particularly those useful for analysis of teachers lessons and the management of "critical sessions" and, note this, curriculum evaluation.

A seventh variable was administrative complexity and finally, an eighth, defect in design. I would like to suggest that the particular factors, inter-district differences, teacher differences, goal ambiguity, role strain and inadequate conceptual tools are clearly among considerations that must be given attention if significant curriculum implementation research projects are to make significant contributions. I was struck by this particular list because I find that as I work with students and researches who are planning research projects in the area of curriculum, that they very rarely cut out one of these kinds of pieces with which to cope. To be sure, we may need some new game rules by which to play, but it would seem that these variables point up some of the very tough questions to which we do not have answers. Hence, we are unable to make the most effective and appropriate curriculum implementation decisions.

I would also further suggest that among the areas as yet virtually untouched in curriculum research is that of examining

the process of curriculum evaluation. Needless to say, I am fully aware when I make this comment of the excellent work that has been done by many, and especially AERA in its monograph series on curriculum evaluation. This work has contributed substantially to understanding questions of methodology, the philosophical dimensions, and analytic procedures, etc. The literature talks at length about the change process, the involvement of staff personnel in the change process and in the change mechanism, training individuals to be effective change agents, and so on and on one can go. There is however, relatively little carefully designed research focussed on the process of curriculum evaluation, the personnel who ought to be involved in the process and their particular impact, nor the means by which results of research is infused into the curriculum implementation decision-making setting.

As we present a case study, one approach is through examining several themes. The first theme might center on the research variables considered in the research by the developer of a particular curriculum. Does the work achieve the goals it purports to? A second theme could center around those variables which a school system examines as it seeks data to use with the community in the decision-making process as the system considers adoption of the curriculum. A third theme may be to refocus on the research of the

developer. The developer's research is always viewed with scepticism, and so it becomes critical for an outside agency or researcher from another vantage point to validate the prior evidence. A fourth theme though our model unfortunately, does not provide evidence on the theme, centers on the nature of longitudinal data and the components of designs for longitudinal studies. At this point we don't seem to have in the literature very satisfactory data on what variables are related to long term change. Neither do we have very good evidence about the relationship of staff involvement to curriculum development and the implementation and the teacher education process.

Here we would submit that the teacher education component, (that is teacher education viewed as a long-term, continuing process) needs to be studied in considerable depth. In fact, it would be the hypothesis of this team, that implementation of any curriculum project of consequence makes a substantial and long-term impact on the total school program. Further, designs for longitudinal studies could well center on the whole question of the relationship between community involvement and decision-making to implement the curriculum in the school district; its long-term impact both on teacher characteristics and the quality of instruction, as well as the long-range impact on the learning of boys and girls. Finally, one must make a plea for the critical need for on-going, long-term funding of research on curriculum

projects and their implementation. If, in fact, effective curriculum research is hamstrung by any factor, it is that there is far too little long-range funding to support longitudinal curriculum activities.

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